

City of Mt. Shasta Municipal Water Utility

Automated Meter Read (AMR) Opt-Out Program

Frequently Asked Questions



Is this the same technology as the “Smart Meter” program that many local electric utilities are installing?

No. Some of the controversy that has been raised relating to electric Smart Meters is not relevant to our water meters. The “Smart Meters” that many electricity utilities are installing (not here in Mount Shasta) send thousands of meter reads every day to a central processing unit that is connected to the electrical grid or network system. The “grid” then sends electricity use and real time rate data back the electrical meter, and allows commercial and residential customers to schedule electrical use activities (like washing dishes or clothes) when electricity use and rates are lower.

Privacy concerns are limited because the water meter data is only sent once a month and only directly to the City in the system we are installing. Fire safety issues associated with the electrical meters are also eliminated because the water meters are battery powered and not connected to the electric service wiring. In addition, transmission of data from the water meters is only 1/10th of one second per month.

Why is the City doing an Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) system?

Monthly automated readings keep City costs and your water bills down. Monthly readings also help conserve water by reporting loss from leaks.

What does “opt out” mean?

Choosing to opt out means you are choosing to have your meter read manually on a semi-annual basis (typically November and April) by City personnel instead of monthly via the AMR system.

Are there costs associated with electing to opt out of the AMR program?

- **Before November 1, 2015**, there is no setup charge, and there is only a \$6 a month charge (\$72 annually) for reading the meters manually. This charge covers the costs of sending City personnel to manually read your meter, and covers the manual costs to compute your bill.
- **November 1, 2015 forward**, you will pay the \$6 monthly Opt-Out charge and there is a one-time, initial setup charge per residence of \$100 to cover the cost of changing and reconfiguring the water meters and AMR system. This charge is only to opt out of the AMR system, and is due upon submittal of the completed Opt-Out Agreement.
- The monthly meter read fees will be added to your utilities billing statement. If you would like to opt-out for other residences on your account, the initial setup charge and the meter read fee will apply to each additional household.

How did Mount Shasta calculate the monthly manual meter reading charge? Can I see a cost breakdown?

The new water meters and AMR system automates meter reading by wirelessly delivering information via a “drive by collection system” to our billing system. When customers opt out of the automated system, Mount Shasta public works and administration incurs additional labor and vehicle costs to process their bills. The proposed charge is based on cost estimates for manually estimating monthly bills and obtaining a manual meter reading on a semi-annual basis.

The annual estimated cost includes estimates for vehicle and equipment use, the labor time to drive to your meter, the time to read and manually enter the reading into the hand held computer, and time to manually enter readings into the billing system. The costs were estimated by reviewing other cities costs.

The \$6 per month estimated manual read charge will be in place for approximately one year. Actual costs for manual meter reading will be tracked once the system is installed and the total number of opt out customers is determined. The charge could increase or decrease in the future based on actual costs.

How was the opt-out policy developed?

A public City Council meeting was held on March 9, 2015 where the opt-out policy was discussed. The draft policy was then reviewed and revised by the City Council. The final opt out policy details were voted on and approved by the City Council on September 14, 2015.

Who can opt out of the Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) program? How do I opt out?

The opt-out program applies to customers with a residential service rate; commercial customers have no opt out option. You must be the property owner to opt out. All customers requesting to opt-out of AMR are required to complete an [opt-out service agreement form](#).

Why do I have to pay to opt out of the AMR program?

Our standard for water meters includes AMR equipment, which has been reviewed and approved by the Mount Shasta City Council. We determined that the costs for non-standard service should be paid by those customers who choose the non-standard service. The opt-out charges cover the costs of removing and reconfiguring the AMR equipment (after November 1, 2015) and semi-annual visits to manually collect meter reads from the non-automated water meters.

Once I opt-out, what will change?

Only after September 15, 2015, we will visit the premise and remove the AMR radio module. The antenna for the radio module will stay in the meter box cover. By removing the automated meter reading components, our personnel must visit the premise semi-annually to manually read the meters.

Are other utility companies offering this option?

Yes. We have researched the opt-out practices of other utilities and monitored events across the country. Our opt-out program follows the best practices that have been developed by other utilities. The average national opt out participation rate is 0.006%.

Will rates be affected by this program?

No, as costs created to manually read meters and do billing will be covered by the participants in the opt-out program. Overall water billing rates will stay flat initially for ALL users; likely for a year or so.

Why do the water meters look the same as they did before the automated equipment was removed?

The same water meters are used to measure consumption, the only difference is the RF transmitting module attached to each meter has been removed; the antenna stays mounted in the meter box cover so we don't have to replace the cover.

Once a customer opts out, will there still be RF frequency in/around their home?

Yes. In today's hi-tech world, RF is emitted from wireless routers, cell phones, microwaves, baby monitors, etc.

Once a customer opts out, can they opt back into automated meter reading?

Yes. If you opt-out, you are responsible for the associated fees incurred as discussed above. If you opt out of the AMR program and then change your mind, the fees are not refundable.

Any customer that opts out, but subsequently elects to opt back in, will not incur any charges or fees to have the AMR equipment placed back in service, and the \$6 a month manual meter read fee will stop. Customers may opt back into the AMR program by calling City Hall at 926-7510.

How do I opt-out? What is the Procedure?

Simply call City Hall at 926-7510 for an opt-out form and get it back to them filled out by no later than October 30, 2015. The opt-out form simply asks you to fill out and sign the form requesting opt out meter reads and that you understand the costs and obligations.